

The New Mayor
Based on G.H. Broadhurst's Successful Play

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

BY
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GEORGE H. BROADHURST

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—At the suburban home of Charles "high financier," he and his broker, Gibbs, hatch up a scheme to corner the street railway stock. They rely upon the support of Dick Horrigan, boss of the spring city, who is coming to discuss with Alderman Phelan, the thorn in the side, whom Wainwright is anxious to get. Also coming. Among the members of Wainwright's household are his niece and his son, Alwyn, a secretive young man in the family, who has implicit confidence in Newman, a neighbor of Wainwright. Newman's continuance in office depends upon Horrigan's favor, requests Wainwright's intervention with the boss. Another visitor to the house is Alwyn Bennett, in love with Gibbs, who is calling to ask her about her engagement to Gibbs. Perry is in love with Cynthia Garrison, also a neighbor. Cynthia is the daughter of a bank president who years before the opening of the story was seduced by the dealings of an unscrupulous man and shot himself. His son thereupon married Mrs. Bennett, congratulating her on the immaculate record of her son's father. Dallas refuses to marry Alwyn. She does something worthy of his family education. Phelan and Horrigan face each other. Phelan defies Horrigan. Judge Horrigan is turned down by the boss, but at Horrigan's request Horrigan agrees to reconsider his case. Horrigan becomes suspicious of Gibbs, but Wainwright scoffs at the idea. Gibbs and Wainwright make a corrupt deal for the former, for a big consideration, is to be on the board of aldermen a permanent franchise for the Borough Street railway. Gibbs is worried by the reform movement taking his power at the coming election, and looking about for a candidate for mayor with a record. He hits upon Bennett, who has some slight political experience. The latter is but a warmonger, that, if elected, he is absolutely honest and independent.

There was you couldn't be of use to me, so why should I talk about it to you?" "But I'd do anything in the world—anything!" "You would?" cut in Horrigan. "Yes, yes! Only give me a chance!" Horrigan considered, then said reluctantly: "The chance is too slight to take at a time like this, and nobody's too rotten to take of use. I've found there are things, one of which will always ruin a man—a woman, ambition or greed. We've tried Bennett on ambition; he doesn't need money, so only the first of the three remains."

"A woman? I don't understand." "Miss Wainwright?" "But—"

"Listen here. Bennett's in love with Wainwright's niece. You've cut him out. Go and tell him he'll let you alone you'll smash the engagement and leave her free to marry him."

"I can't! I—hold on, though! After all I could deny the whole thing. Didn't I? It'd be his word against mine, and she'd never believe I could do such a thing. I—I might try."

"Yes," growled Horrigan, "you might, but that's lost all his nerve can try to get that even an ordinary crook could balk at."

"Gibbs did not hear. He had remained in the corridor in search of Bennett. The man scarcely deserved the opprobrium heaped on him by Horrigan. A brilliant, daring operator, he was unknown to himself, a rank coward at heart. For the first time in his life the cowardice had cropped out, and to do Gibbs justice, it had driven him temporarily insane. In his normal senses he would never have stooped to the plan he was now so eager to carry out. It was a puerile bit of jealousy at which a financially drowning man did not scruple to clutch."

Horrigan followed him from the door, his own splendid nerve quite restored from the crushing blow his boss had received. He had staked his life on the deal. Moreover, its failure, as he knew, meant the wreck of his mightily potent prestige. He had long and vainly built up. It

threat about the notes, lead to graver personal consequences. Yet the bulldog pluck that had carried this man of iron from the gutter to the summit of political power did not desert him, nor did he show the loss of one iota of his customary monumental calm.

Scarcely had Horrigan quitted the room when Perry and Dallas entered it.

"You could cut the atmosphere in there with a cheese knife," Perry was saying. "Williams doesn't think the Borough bill will come up for half an hour or so. We'd better spend the time till then in here than to stay there and turn our lungs into a microbe zoo."

Dallas did not answer. She sat down by the table and rested her head dejectedly on one little gloved hand. The sight of Bennett, his grave, hopeless appeal to her; the calm, utter despair of his brave face—all these had affected her deeply. Perry noticed with brotherly concern her look and attitude. "Feeling faint?" he asked.

"No, I'm all right, thanks."

"You look pretty near as blue as Alwyn. He?"

"Don't let's talk of him, please," she begged.

"Why not? He's the whitest chap this side of Whiteville."

"That's what I used to think, but I know better now."

"Then, miss," broke in a voice from the doorway, "you're entitled to another 'know.'"

Phelan, who, passing down the corridor, had heard her last words as he reached the threshold, turned into the room.

"Excuse me for buttin' in on a family chat," he remarked, coming forward, "but I'm pretty well posted on his honor's character, an' when I hear any more about him it's me to the bot."

What have you got against Mr. Bennett? "None of your measly business," says you. 'Quite so,' says I, an', that bein' the case, let's hear all about it."

Something that underlay the seeming impertinence of the alderman's bluff speech touched Dallas. On impulse she spoke:

"Mr. Bennett," said she, "is opposing the Borough bill, knowing we shall be paupers if he defeats it. He also sold Borough stock short before he announced his veto. What can one think of a man who enriches himself at the expense of his friends?"

"Gee," cried Perry, "that's a terrible thing! Bennett's the original man higher up, I'm afraid. I wonder he isn't afraid to wear the clothes of such a wicked geezer as himself!"

"Oh, Perry! Don't joke about it!" begged Dallas. "Can't you see the serious side of anything? We shall be penniless and dependent on—"

"Fear thou not, sister mine!" declared Perry in his best melodramatic manner. "Paupers, sayest thou? Fie! be it so! Little Brother Perry will guard them from the cold, shivery swats of a wintry wind. Maybe we can sell violets or start a fight club or—"

"Don't!" she urged, jarred by his flippancy. "You don't understand. I—"

"As for that story of his honor's sellin' stock short and makin' a pile of cash on his own veto," put in Phelan genuinely worried, "Horrigan's looked it up an' got enough facts to make him think he can prove it. He's goin' to make Williams tell the whole story to the aldermen tonight. It's a lie, of course, but it'll hurt his honor a lot, an' the worst of it is Bennett refuses to deny it."

"He does, eh?" remarked Perry. "Then I'll do some talking about it. I'll have to fracture a promise I made Alwyn, but I guess it's worth while."

"What do you mean?" queried Dallas in wonder.

"I mean Bennett lent me the money to sell enough stock short to make up for what you and I would lose if the bill was quashed, and he gave me a letter to his own broker. We carried it through, and now you and I stand pat to win whichever way the cat jumps. We're on velvet, thanks to Alwyn."

"He did this for us?" gasped Dallas in amazement. "But why didn't you tell me? Why did you let me misjudge him?"

"He made me promise not to let you know a thing about it, and—"

"Say, youngster," broke in Phelan, tingling with excitement, "you come chasin' along with me into the aldermen's meetin'. I'll have you get up there an' tell what you know. It'll knock that lie of Williams' and Horrigan's so high it'll forget to hit groun' again. Come on, son! There's sure liable to be hot dinin' in this meetin' in about eleven seconds. Come along!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DALLAS, left alone in Horrigan's private room, sat at the big table, making no effort to follow her brother and Phelan. A messenger, searching for Horrigan, bustled in, looked inquiringly at the motionless, white faced girl, then passed on to the committee room beyond and on again in his search until the sound of his footsteps died. And still Dallas sat, inert, dumb.

Little by little she was piecing together the facts of the long, miserable complication in the light of what Perry had just told her. It was absurdly easy now that she held the key of the situation. She could understand everything—how Wainwright had put her fortune into Borough stock to influence Bennett; how, failing to move the latter, he had used Alwyn's knowledge of the fact as a weapon against the young man; how Bennett had sought to save her fortune and why he had forbidden Perry to bias her feelings by telling of the generous act.

"From first to last," she murmured in unhappy contrition, "he has acted honorably and as he thought I would have wanted him to and for my happiness. And I, like the wretched little fool I was, couldn't understand and publicly humiliated him. Oh, if only it weren't too late to—"

A vision of Gibbs flashed before her mind, and she shuddered, realizing all that her rash steps had entailed.

"It is too late," she confessed to herself, fighting back the hot tears that seared her eyes. "But at least I can tell him I know and beg his forgiveness and thank him."

The sound of voices in the corridor roused her from her bitter reverie. She sprang up hastily, unwilling that any should see her tear stained face, but the speakers, though they drew near, did not enter Horrigan's office. Instead, they stepped into the adjoining committee room. The messenger had left ajar the door between the two rooms. Realizing this and not wishing to be seen, Dallas shrank back toward the wall, fearful of detection. Then the voice of one of the speakers suddenly arrested her notice.

"Well," Bennett was saying in no especially civil tones, "you said you wished to speak to me in private. What have you to say? Be brief, for I am busy."

Finding herself the unwilling witness to what promised to be a confidential talk, Dallas stole toward the door leading to the corridor, but Horrigan, as was his custom, had locked it on going out. She dared not enter alone the crowded anteroom in her present state, so hesitatingly she paused, forced to remain where she was. The sound of another voice chained her to the spot, and, unconscious of eavesdropping, she stood spellbound, hearing every word distinctly through the half open doorway.

"I—I hardly know how to begin," Gibbs was replying to Bennett's curt demand. "It is a delicate subject and—"

"Then the sooner it is treated to open air the better. Is—"

"You've won the Borough bill fight," began Gibbs.

"Is that all you have to say to me?"

"No. You've won, but you've lost far more. You've lost Dallas Wainwright."

"I hardly need to be reminded of that," retorted Bennett, "and it is a subject I don't care to discuss."

"But listen," pleaded Gibbs as the mayor made a move as though to leave the room. "One minute! I say you've won the Borough fight. I've won Dallas. Can't we?"

"Well, what?" asked Bennett, with ominous quiet as he paused in his departure.

"Can't we—strike some sort of bargain?" said Gibbs tentatively.

"Explain, please," ordered Bennett, with that same deceptive calm.

"Why," went on Gibbs, emboldened at the other's seeming complacency, "suppose you give up this Borough fight and I give up Dallas? I won her by a trick. She doesn't really love me. It is her pride, not her heart, that made her throw you over and accept me. It is you she loves, and I've known it all along, and you are in love with her."

"What then?"

"Just this," returned Gibbs, wondering at Bennett's quiet reception of the strange offer. "She will marry me because she isn't the sort of girl to go back on her promise, especially since she looks on me as a sort of high minded martyr to your oppression, so if I hold her to her word she will not back down. Now, if you, even now, withdraw your opposition to the Borough bill



"Gibbs, I didn't think there was so foul a cur as you in all the world."

world. I thought I understood how utterly rotten you were, but I didn't believe there was a man living who could debase himself as you've just done."

"But"—began Gibbs, in bewilderment.

"Now you'll listen to me for a moment," cut in Bennett, silencing the interruption. "You say I'm in love with Miss Wainwright. It is true. I love her in a way a dog like you could never understand if he tried for a lifetime. I'd give my life for one word of love from her, but I'd sooner go forever without that word than win it by a dishonest deed that would prove me unworthy of her. I asked her love as a free gift and tried to deserve it. She refused, and I won't try to buy what she won't give me, especially since the price would make me as unworthy of her as you yourself are."

"But you take the wrong view of it. You see, it"—

"I see this much: I'll have to speak plainer to get my view of the case into your vile mind. If ever again you meet me, stand out of my way. Don't speak to me or come where I am, for



The eavesdropper.

if you cross my path again I'll treat you ten thousand times worse than when I thrashed you in that football game. That's all."

Bennett, restraining his wrath with a mighty effort, turned on his heel and strode off into the corridor, leaving Gibbs staring after him in dumb, impotent despair.

When the broker had recovered himself sufficiently to start from the room Dallas Wainwright stood before him, barring the exit. Her face was dead white, her big dark eyes ablaze.

"Wait!" she commanded. "I must speak to you—for the last time."

"Dallas!" gasped the desperate man, his drawn face turning positively yellow. "You were—you—you heard?"

"Mr. Bennett just now called you 'the foulest cur in all the world,'" said Dallas, her voice scarcely louder than a whisper, yet every syllable stinging as a whiplash. "He put it too mildly."

"But, sweetheart!"

"Miss Wainwright, please. I heard you offer to sell me to him in exchange for his conscience. If my own brother had told me such a thing I would not have believed him, but I myself heard it. And I heard his splendid answer."

"But, you know, I was joking! That it was just a trick to—"

"Just such a trick that made me promise to be your wife? Yes, but this time you had to do with a man—a man in a million—not with a poor, credulous little idiot like me. And he answered you as I should have answered you had my eyes been opened in time. I—"

"Dallas," groaned Gibbs, "for heaven's sake don't look at me like that! I can't bear it! I love you! And I—"

"And I in my criminal folly promised to marry you!" she stormed. "I let you kiss me. My lips are degraded forever by that touch of yours. I let you speak words of love to me. I broke

a brave man's heart for your worthless sake. Oh, the shame—the horrible shame of it all! But I shall thank God on my bended knees that I have found out the truth before it was too late."

"Too late?" he echoed in horror, his voice rising almost to a scream. "Dallas, you're not going to throw me over? You aren't?"

"Scott Gibbs," she answered quietly, a world of wondering scorn in her level tones, "you do not even know how vile a thing you are. Now leave me, please. Your presence sickens me."

He tried to speak, but something of the ineffable contempt in her steady eyes silenced him.

Without a word he slunk out of the room and out of her life.

Phelan, agog with eagerness for the coming struggle in the aldermanic chamber, bustled past through the corridor. The alderman had many duties today, and as the performance of each brought him nearer to his longed for revenge on Horrigan he was positively beaming with righteous bliss. Dallas caught sight of him.

"Alderman!" she called faintly.

Phelan halted, still in haste to fulfill his mission.

"Could—could I see Mr. Bennett?" she asked, a new timidity transforming her rich voice. "Do you know where I can find him?"

"Is it important? He's pretty busy."

"Very important!" she pleaded. "I must see him at once."

"I'll look him up," agreed Phelan, "but I warn you he's too busy to see you just yet. Suppose you let me take you back to the meetin'? Our bill's comin' up in a few minutes now, an' you don't want to miss it. Then I'll scare up his honor for you as soon as he's got a spare minute an' bring you back here to him. Sorry to keep you waitin'."

he went on as they started toward the council chamber, "but before this session's over all sorts of things is due to explode, an' we ain't hardly at the beginnin' of the excitement yet. We're goin' to make a Fourth of July celebration in a giant powder factory look like a deaf mute funeral by the time waves you."

CHAPTER XVII.

HIS in there!" observed Phelan in high excitement, jerking his thumb toward a door leading off to the committee room. "An' I've sent for Wainwright an' Horrigan to meet your honor here. An' I've fixed it so the Borough bill won't come up for ten minutes. Now, all that's left is to touch the punk to the fuse an' set off the whole giddy bunch of fireworks under 'em. Gee, but it's good to 'a' stuck to this old world just for the sake of bein' here today an' seein' what I'm due to see!"

The alderman chuckled, but his joyous anticipation found no reflection in Bennett's white set face. The two were in the committee room, whither Phelan had repaired after depositing Dallas in a chair beside her brother at the meeting and attending to one of two details of greater import.

"Yes," went on Phelan, again nodding mysteriously toward the farther door, "he's in there, trained to the minute for the blowout. There's some one else wants to see you, too—some one who'll make more of a hit with you if I'm not overplayin' my hand. But good news can wait. There's so little of it in this measly life that it generally has to. I—"

From the corridor Horrigan stamped into the committee room, Wainwright at his heels.

"Well!" cried the boss defiantly, glaring at Bennett and ignoring Phelan. "You sent for us. What do you want?"

"One moment!" intervened Wainwright. "We are beaten. We admit that without argument. So we need waste no time going over details."

"Have you sent for us to say what you'll sell out for?" queried Horrigan coarsely. "because if you have you've only to name your price. You've got us where you want us. We've got to pay."

"I should have thought," replied Bennett, with no shade of offense, "you would know by this time that I have no price."

"Then what do you want?"

"Nothing—from you."

"Why did you send word you wanted to see us?" growled Horrigan impatiently as he and Wainwright, uninvited, seated themselves at the table.

"To tell you," answered Alwyn, glancing from one to the other, "that every step you two have taken in this

Church—Did you ever work for a railroad company? Gotham—Well, yes. I've tried to open the car windows—Yonkers Statesman.

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